

A Lesson in Mission Management

I. Jesus served the earthly needs of many

II Jesus solved the eternal needs of all

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they went with James and John to the home of Simon and Andrew. ³⁰Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they immediately told Jesus about her. ³¹So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.

³²That evening after sunset the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. ³³The whole town gathered at the door, ³⁴and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons, but he would not let the demons speak because they knew who he was.

³⁵Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. ³⁶Simon and his companions went to look for him, ³⁷and when they found him, they exclaimed: "Everyone is looking for you!"

³⁸Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come." ³⁹So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.

Tell me, have you ever felt like you are never going to get it all done? You know, you start the day with this list of things that you really want to accomplish, and then the phone rings, and someone needs some advice, and there are these emails you need to answer, a co-worker drops by with a project for you, the internet goes down, the kids need your attention, and before you know it, you're thinking, "Where did the day go? What did I do with my time? Did I accomplish anything I wanted to accomplish? For that matter, am I doing what I'm supposed to be doing?"

My friends, if you've ever experienced a situation like this, (and really, who hasn't?), you're not alone. 2000 years ago, Jesus faced the challenge of carrying out the mission his Father had given to him. God, in effect, gave Jesus a heavenly to-do list. And how Jesus handled that list, how he balanced the immediate needs of people around him versus their eternal needs, how he made time for what was important, versus what was merely urgent, the way that Jesus stayed focused on the big picture, his true mission in life—all these things help equip us to do the very same thing in our lives today.

This morning, we turn to Mark's gospel, chapter 1, where Jesus offers us what we might call:

A Lesson in Mission Management.

We'll see that, I. Jesus Served the earthly needs of many.

While in fact, II. He Solved the eternal needs of all.

Our text for today picks up relatively early in Jesus' earthly ministry. Jesus has already called some of his first apostles and is now beginning to travel around teaching in the Jewish synagogues and healing people of their physical ailments. Well, it's that practice of healing people that really caused Jesus' popularity to skyrocket. Suddenly everyone wants to see Jesus. In a day and age when there were no hospitals, pharmacies or rehab facilities, people who were

sick or disabled, basically had to suffer through it, maybe for their entire lives. So when this miracle worker named Jesus comes to town, is it any wonder people come flocking to his side? Isn't that what happened here in our text? Mark tells us, *That evening after sunset* (in other words, after the Sabbath day came to an end and travel restrictions were lifted), *the people brought to Jesus all the sick and demon-possessed. The whole town gathered at the door* (that would be at the door of Simon Peter's house, where Jesus was staying that night).

Can you imagine this throng of people crying out for Jesus' attention? I mean, you think you have a long to-do list. How about a line of hurting people stretching around the block, all begging for your attention? And of course, this was not the only time this happened. Two chapters later, Mark documents a time when *Jesus entered a house and again a crowd gathered so that he and his disciples were not even able to eat. (Mark 3:20)* Other times, the crowds pressed up against Jesus, just trying to touch his garment. In fact, Luke tells us that on one occasion, *the crowds almost crushed him. (Luke 8:42)*

Now put yourself in Jesus' sandals. As true man, can you imagine the emotional burden that these thousands of people would have had on Jesus? I mean, to see this endless stream of people who are suffering severe pain or leprosy or paralysis. People who are blind or mute or deaf. And to think that they're all looking to you to provide them with some kind of relief. That's a lot of pressure. It's a really long to-do list. But what does Jesus do? He took the time to meet their physical needs. Time and time again, scripture says that Jesus healed them.

The question is, why? Of all the other things that Jesus could have been doing with his time, why did he spend so much time restoring people back to health? Two reasons. First, Because he could. and second, Because he cared. Isn't that right? As the eternal Son of God who had brought into existence the entire universe, Jesus could do anything he wanted. With his voice or with his touch, Jesus could make the blind see, the lame walk, yes, the dead come alive. As Jesus once said, *"With God all things are possible."* (Matthew 19:26)

And yet, Jesus healing activity was not just an expression of power. It was also an expression of his compassion. Think of how many times scripture makes statements like, *When Jesus saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick (Matthew 14:14)*. Or when Jesus came across those two blind men on the road to Jericho. Scripture says, *Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight (Matthew 20:34)*. The point is this. Jesus healed people not only because he had the ability to do it. He also had the desire to do it. Jesus cared for those he created. He met their earthly needs.

Isn't the same thing true today? When you or someone you love is dealing with a physical ailment. When you've got a bad back or you're struggling with depression or the doctors found a lump or your heart is going into arrhythmia—no matter what your physical issue is, isn't it comforting to know that Jesus knows? Jesus cares. You can bring your defective parts to the Lord in prayer and know that he has the ability to make you whole again. Now, does Jesus always exercise his healing of power in your life and mine? No, sometimes he uses our ailments to serve a greater purpose. Sometimes he says to us what he said to Saint Paul. *"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (2 Corinthians 12:9). The bottom line is still the same. No matter what your ailments, look to Jesus. He'll either heal what ails you or he'll give you the strength to bear up under it, gracefully.

But now, let's go back to the situation that Jesus found himself in here in our text. Jesus had spent the whole day teaching in the synagogue. While he was there, he drove a demon out of a man who was possessed, absolutely filling the crowd with amazement. When Jesus finally arrived at the house where he was going to stay the night, you'd think he'd want to relax. But no. Turns out

there was more for Jesus to do. Peter's mother-in-law was in bed burning up with a fever. So, as Mark says, *they immediately told Jesus about her. And what did Jesus do? He went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them. (Mark 1:31)* Another miracle serving the earthly needs of someone he loved.

But still, Jesus wasn't done for the day. After the sun went down, that's when that whole crowd of people gathered outside his door that we read about earlier. And Jesus healed them all. Now, Scripture doesn't tell us exactly how late Jesus got to bed. But it does tell us this: *Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, (we might say, "in the middle of the night") Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, to do what? To take a hot bath? To enjoy a little R&R? To maybe get a massage? No, he went off to a solitary place where he prayed.* That's right. In spite of all the other things that were going on in his life, or maybe I should say, because of all the other things that were going on in this life, Jesus made a point to spend some time with his Heavenly Father in prayer. And just to make sure it actually happened, what did Jesus do? He did it first thing in the morning. Before anything else on his schedule, before his cell phone could ring or the texts started to come in, before the morning news came on, or the kids came knocking on his door, Jesus devoted some quality time to a conversation with his Heavenly Father.

Hmmm. I wonder if there's a lesson there for us? Could it be that if we want to devote some quality time to something, we have to do it first thing in the morning, before all the other distractions start? Now maybe you're more disciplined than I am. Maybe you can carve out time for prayer and bible study in the middle of your day. Or maybe you are able to relax with a little Bible reading at the end of the day. If you can, that's awesome. But for me, if I don't start my day with some time in the Word, so often, it just never happens. If I don't prioritize that component of my spiritual life, I'm running after a hundred other things—many of which are not bad things. They're often good things, urgent things, things I need to do. But they are not the most important thing.

In fact, I sometimes wonder if that wasn't what Jesus was praying to his Heavenly Father about there in that solitary place. Could it be that, as Jesus thought about all the things that he had to do, is he thought about the countless people he'd be coming into contact with each day, the crowds of people who demanded his attention, the people whose needs were so great—could it be that Jesus just had to ask, "Father, what would you have me do? Should I focus on healing all these sick people or should I focus on something else? Of all the things I could be doing, what should I be doing?"

Well, if that was the question that Jesus was asking, it didn't take God long to answer it, or for Jesus to share the answer with his disciples. When Simon Peter comes looking for Jesus and tells him that everyone else is looking for him as well (in other words, "C'mon Jesus, there are more people for you to heal,") what was Jesus' response? He said, *"Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That's why I have come."* (Mark 1:38)

In other words, Jesus was once again focused on his #1 mission in life. Jesus came to this world to do more than I. Serve the earthly needs of many. No, II. Jesus came to solve the eternal needs of all. Isn't that right? Even though Jesus certainly performed a lot of miracles, especially early in his ministry, the fact is, all those miracles provided only temporary fixes. The day after Jesus fed the 5000, they were all hungry again. The skin that Jesus restored to the ten lepers, eventually got old and gray and rotted off the bone. Even Lazarus whom Jesus called out of the grave, ultimately ended up back in a grave again. If all the Jesus came to do was to give people a temporary respite from the physical effects of sin in our world, well, we might admire what he

did, but we wouldn't worship him for it. We might call Jesus a miracle worker, but he wouldn't be our savior.

But the fact is, Jesus fixed far more than people's temporary problems. He fixed their eternal problem. He fixed our eternal problem. By living a perfect life in our place, by offering his life as payment for our sins, Jesus has rescued us from the eternal consequences of sin. He's freed us from the guilt of sin, the power of sin and the eternal separation from God which our sins deserved. By carrying out that #1 mission, Jesus not only kept his priorities straight. He helped set our priorities as well.

Isn't that right? When we realize everything that God has done for us in Christ, it makes us appreciate what is truly important, be it, the forgiveness God has won for us in Christ, the personal relationship we now enjoy with our heavenly Father, the faith which the Spirit has worked in our hearts, the need we have to feed that faith through God's Word and sacrament.

In fact, don't you see that played out in the lives of believers who have gone before us? You think of the account of Mary and Martha, for example. Martha had so many things to do. She had a to-do list a mile long. Sweep the house, set the table, make the dinner. But Mary? She had one thing to do. She chose to sit at Jesus' feet and listen to the words of her Savior. How did Jesus react to her choice? He said, "*Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.*" (Luke 10:42)

Now, does that mean that Mary shirked all her other responsibilities and laid on the couch all day? I doubt it. You see, when people make Jesus #1, they find ways to serve others, as well. Isn't that what happened here in our text, with Simon Peter's mother-in-law? I find it interesting that all three gospels say the very same thing about this woman. She was burning up with a fever. Jesus takes her by the hand and heals her. And immediately she begins to wait on them. It's like she couldn't wait to show her gratitude to God—by caring for the needs of others.

Let's face it. Chances are, we'll always have things on our to-do list. And I pray that a lot of those things have to do with serving the needs of others, just like Jesus did. But even when you and I don't get everything done the way we hoped, we can still be sure that we're all right with God, because Jesus got everything done on his to-do list. And he got it done for you, for time and for eternity. And that's the most important thing! Amen.